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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 7715
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1430
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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4756
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 1428
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RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0760
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0892
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 9825
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 4151
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BANGKOK 005151

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NSC FOR PHU

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [TH](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON BURMA, AS SEEN FROM THAILAND

REF: A. BANGKOK 5127 (SONTHI ON BURMA)

[1](#)B. BEIJING 6338 (CHINESE MFA ON BURMA)

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. James F. Entwistle, reason 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) The RTG appears not to have made preparations for a possible influx of Burmese refugees; we are discussing the matter with our contacts. The RTG is engaged in evacuation contingency planning. A Burmese exile in Thailand said monks were protesting in large numbers in Mandalay, and he shared his views on figures who might play a role in a transition government in Burma. A Human Rights Watch official said Thai officials at the border were searching cars for Burmese activists trying to return to their country. Members of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus, at a public forum in Bangkok, criticized the Burmese crackdown. After a slow start, the Thai press began actively covering the crackdown in Burma, and we have actively disseminated USG views. A Chinese diplomat shared his government's position with us. End Summary.

PREPARATION FOR REFUGEES

[1](#)2. (C) Post's refugee coordinator met with a working-level contact at the National Security Council at mid-day on September 27 and asked about RTG preparedness for a possible influx of refugees from Burma. The NSC official said the RTG had not yet made contingency plans "because we don't think it is that serious yet." Our refugee coordinator traveled on

September 28 to meet with the Governor of Tak province (which borders Burma's Karen State) and planned to raise contingency planning with him.

THAI EVACUATION PLANNING

13. (C) Reliable contacts tell us that the RTG has two Blackhawk helicopters and three C-130s standing by in case they have to pull Thai citizens out of Burma.

AN EXILE'S VIEWS

14. (C) We met on September 28 with Zaw Oo, one of the founders of the Vahu Development Institute and part of the 88 Generation. (Note: During our meeting, he received a call from Mandalay informing him that monks there had come out after lunch to protest in large numbers. End Note.)

15. (C) Zaw Oo admitted that the Burmese exile community was not in a position to provide leadership for those in Burma; they cannot "call the shots and issues orders" to those in the country. They are hindered by their physical location and instead must take a supporting role. This primarily takes the form of technical support, providing ideas and resources. In particular, he stated that there is an "information central command" operating out of Thailand. Individuals inside the country have difficulty passing information to each other, so they send their information to this command center, which is then able to distribute it within Burma. When pressed, he was not willing to elaborate on this mechanism.

16. (C) Zaw Oo said he did not yet expect to see a significant

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refugee flow from Burma to neighboring countries. He explained that political activists in Burma think it would be difficult to return to their country once they leave.

17. (C) Discussing scenarios for forming a new government in Burma in the event of the regime's collapse, Zaw Oo acknowledged that the exile community would be largely sidelined during the formation of the transition government, though he implied that their international experience could be a source of technical assistance. He also believed that, after an initial period of elation, pro-democracy figures would experience political infighting and factionalism, likely leading to further instability.

18. (C) Zaw Oo believed a new, more democratic government in Burma would have to rely on Aung San Suu Kyi as its unifying figure and symbolic leader, but it should also rely on the few 'seasoned' bureaucrats of high stature who remain in the country, as well as several former military leaders whom he viewed as being of a more moderate or reformist stance. He cited former Brigadier General Zaw Tun (Former Deputy Minister for National Planning and Economic Development) and General Khin Nyunt (former Chief of Intelligence) as possible candidates for participating in a transition government, citing their experience in government, their ability to bridge the gap between the military and democratic movement, and their proven interest in reform. Oo mentioned a third figure, U Thinn (phonetic), whom he said had substantial experience, particularly with the United Nations, and his current outspokenness against the current regime.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH PERSPECTIVE

19. (C) Sunai Pasuk of Human Rights Watch (HRW) told us on September 27 that HRW was having increasing difficulty contacting its sources inside Burma. He said he was at the northern border with Burma earlier in the week and witnessed Thai officials searching vehicles going into Burma; he said

they were searching for activists trying to enter Burma and had a list of names of known Burmese dissidents in Thailand. He confirmed that there had yet to be an increase in the flow of Burmese refugees to Thailand.

ASEAN INTER-PARLIAMENTARY MYANMAR CAUCUS

¶10. (U) Former Senator Kraisaak Choonhavan, a member of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus (AIPMC), appeared on September 27 at a press event organized by the Foreign Correspondents Club of Thailand (FCCT). He was joined by a Malaysian AIPMC colleague, Datuk Zaid Ibrahim. Kraisaak said Thai government sources told him more than 200 persons had been killed in recent violence -- most of the victims were monks, but 40 children had also died, along with a Japanese Kyoto News foreign correspondent. (Comment: We have heard various rumors alleging 200 people killed, but we do not know the origin or credibility of this figure. End Comment.)

¶11. (C) Voicing his personal views, Kraisaak said Burma should be expelled from ASEAN and suggested the RTG stop issuing visas to Burmese officials. Kraisaak privately told us he drafted policy recommendations, which included Burmese expulsion from ASEAN, that were viewed as too forward-leaning and were under revision by colleagues in the Democrat Party (DP) and other Thai officials. Kraisaak said the DP quietly supported organizations in Thailand opposed to the Burmese regime, and the party allowed him and others to speak their personal views. Kraisaak also condemned recent comments that

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appeared sympathetic to the Burmese regime by General Sonthi Boonyaratglin (ref A).

¶12. (U) Ibrahim remarked that ASEAN was not well suited to make hard decisions and, especially as only approximately half of the ten ASEAN countries could be considered democratic, it would be unrealistic to expect a strong ASEAN response to the Burmese crackdown. He suggested that the UN would be more able to and should organize a collective response to the situation in Burma.

¶13. (U) Organizers of the FCCT event distributed an AIPMC press statement. This noted the "sheer disappointment and concern" of the AIPMC. It said "AIPMC parliamentarians from Malaysia, Indonesia, Philippines, Cambodia, Thailand and Singapore condemn the actions of the junta and strongly urge them to initiate peaceful discussions with the monks as well as political and ethnic leaders to resolve the conflict. AIPMC also calls on ASEAN leaders to immediately intervene in the situation to prevent further untoward incidents in one of its member countries."

¶14. (U) A senior Thai monk participating in the FCCT event, when asked what Thai monks were doing to react to the violence against their Burmese counterparts, replied that they had no plans to play an active role in supporting the Burmese monks' efforts but hoped for a peaceful resolution. Kraisaak derided the lack of action by Thai monks, observing that even monks in Cambodia had been able to put together a written declaration responding to events in Burma.

THAI PRESS COVERAGE PICKS UP DURING WEEK,
INCLUDES U.S. MESSAGE

¶15. (U) Local Thai-language press coverage of the situation in Burma was relatively slow to take off. With the exception of one editorial in the English-language daily "The Nation," local Thai-language press carried no stories about Burma on September 24. The first Thai-language press reports appeared on September 25, nearly one week after protests began. Matichon, the only daily to cover the story on that day, published a front-page article and photos of the monk-led protests. In contrast, all local television outlets carried

coverage of the events in their morning news reports on September 25. Print press coverage ramped up quickly and by September 26 all local Thai-language dailies were headlining reports on events in Burma and all local television stations continued to cover the protests. A survey of Thai-language blogs on September 26 found that the situation in Burma was discussed, but only in very superficial terms; rather than address events in Burma, they used that story as a hook to criticize the Thai coup-makers and interim government.

¶16. (U) On both September 27 and 28, all Thai-language dailies again ran headlines and photos, some quite graphic, of the violence taking place in Rangoon and television coverage continued. On September 28, five local Thai-language dailies ran lead editorials criticizing the harsh actions taken by the Burmese government in response to the peaceful protests. In addition, Channel 3, 9 and TITV aired clips of Prime Minister Surayud's UNGA address in which he said ASEAN was "tired of persuading Burma to return to democracy."

¶17. (U) The Public Affairs Section (PA) has been working actively with local journalists and others to publicize the USG message on Burma. On September 26, PAO and IO held a lunch with local journalists, where discussion focused on the

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situation in Burma. At the Ambassador's latest informal "coffee" discussion with international journalists at his residence on September 27, questions focused almost exclusively on Burma. PA distributed the First Lady's remarks on Burma and links to her VOA interview to some websites; the interview was subsequently featured prominently on the online blog of "The Nation." PA also created a special page on its website with updated "News and Announcements on Burma" and all recent USG statements, including that of the President and the Department of Treasury, have been placed prominently on the Mission's homepage. The President's statement and the press release from the Department of Treasury were sent to all local media as press releases and distributed at the above-mentioned FCCT meeting.

CHINESE DIPLOMAT ECHOES HQ VIEW

¶18. (C) We spoke on September 27 with Yao Wen, Political and Press Affairs Section Director (number two in the section) at the PRC Embassy in Bangkok. Yao said: 1) China wants stability in Burma; 2) China wants national reconciliation in Burma; 3) China believes the current situation should be resolved "properly" by the Burmese government. When we asked whether "properly" meant "peacefully," Yao first said that it was up to the Burmese people to make that judgment, but then he reluctantly conceded that, in his personal opinion, the word "proper" did imply a peaceful solution. (We note that Yao seemed to echo the perspective reported by Embassy Beijing in ref B.)
ENTWISTLE